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March 4, 2010 Energy and Technology Committee Hearing

Testimony of Shirley Bergert¹

RB 5365: AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTRIC DISTRIBUTION COMPANIES

Recommended Action Regarding Section 7: Reject proposal to reduce residential customer shut-off protections. There has been no showing of need to reduce shut-off protections to customers and the modifications put vulnerable households at serious risk.

This proposal reduces shut-off protections for residential customers by allowing service terminations at times where such shut-offs are currently prohibited, including:

- Fridays that are not legal holidays or the day before a legal holiday if the utility is open on Saturday or the DPUC determines there are sufficient Saturday payment sites, and
- Saturday, Sunday, legal holidays or the day before a legal holiday.

Greater protections are provided for business customers.

If a working household has service terminated, residents may not know of the loss of needed utility service until Friday night. A residential household that has service terminated on a Friday may be able to get to a payment site on Saturday, but it will not do any good if they need emergency assistance to make a payment; emergency assistance can only be accessed on a weekday.

Over the course of three days, the household will likely lose all refrigerated food, may have to resort to dangerous use of candles for lighting or dangerous heat sources, may not be able to safely prepare food, flush toilets, bathe, brush teeth or maintain sanitary conditions. If a household includes an infant or elderly, disabled or ill individual, these losses can be particularly dangerous.

And the likely loss of service between Friday and arranging service reinstatement is actually more than three days in most cases. An appointment to access emergency assistance may not be immediately available or the individual may have difficulty scheduling an appointment if working or there is a need to arrange transportation. Then arrangements have to be made to reinstate utility service which adds more time. Three days may well stretch into five or more.

Creating this danger is unnecessary. There is no need to reduce these consumer protections which have served Connecticut well for decades.

¹ Shirley Bergert serves: on the Low Income Energy Advisory Board (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16a-41b); as the residential representative on the Energy Conservation Management Board overseeing the expenditure of ratepayer conservation funds in Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16-245m); as the low income representative on the Fuel Oil Conservation Board (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16a-22f); and on the Advisory Board of the Institute for Sustainable Energy at ECSU.